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RULES DOCKET

Date: 8/5/99 4:01 AM
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Priority: Normal
Subject: testimony on docket FAA 99-5926 -) 2

1999 AUG 11 P 12:33

From The Maricopa Audubon Society, Phoenix, Arizona
To: US DEPT. OF TRANS.

8-4-99

U.S. Department of Transportation Dockets,
Docket No. [FAA99-5926]
400 Seventh Street, SW.,
Washington DC, 20590

Dear Dept. of Transportation Dockets:

On behalf of the 3200 families of the Maricopa Chapter of the National Audubon Society here in central Arizona we wish to make the following comments about the excessive air traffic noise over the Grand Canyon National Park.

-- The FAA is consistently failing to meet the mandate to "substantially restore the natural quiet" in the 1987 law. The agency should follow the law.

-- The FAA should require the removal of all flights below the rim.

-- The FAA has allowed the noise to get worse at the Canyon. The number of air tours has doubled from 50,000 annually in 1987 to around 120,000 now. The FAA should both reduce and cap the number of air tours to at least 1987 levels to achieve the natural quiet that the law mandates.

-- The FAA proposal falls short of even the weak standard for restoration of the natural quiet. The agency says that only 41% (improved from 32%) of the Park will be quiet 75% of the day. All the rest of the Park has aircraft noise up to 100% of the day! This does not even meet the weak Park Service standard of 50% of the Park with aircraft noise "only" 25% of the day (with no noise limits in the other 50% of the park). Substantial restoration of natural quiet should mean most of the Park most of the time, for example 75% of the Park, 100% of the time.

-- The FAA should close the Dragon Corridor (which is located just west of Hermit's Rest.) This corridor impacts the Hermit, Boucher, Waldron, and Tonto trails.

-- The FAA proposal would wrap tour flights closer around the south side of Point Sublime. This is an unacceptable way to treat visitor experience at such a spectacular and noted backcountry vista site, one the Park's own management plan says will be a future focus of increased North Rim visitation.

-- The Grand Canyon is one of the naturally quietest places on Earth. It is a place where visitors expect to get in touch with nature and enjoy the "natural quiet," including the sounds of the wind, trickling streams, or the call of a condor. They should not have to listen to aircraft up to every

three minutes as occurs in many locations. Quiet deserves as much protection as other park resources.

-- Flight free zones need to be large or they do not work. The FAA should demand larger flight free zones in order to protect areas like Marble Canyon

and the Powell Plateau.

-- Over 94% of Grand Canyon National Park is proposed wilderness; it should sound like a wilderness.

-- The FAA should require all air tours at the Canyon to use the quietest aircraft.

The airplane noise truly degrades the experience when hiking or birdwatching in the canyon. Bird songs cannot even be heard sometimes.

It is a sad commentary that noise free zones and quieter aircraft cannot be erected away from birders, hikers, and those who like the canyon's solitude.

My wife and I have conducted a breeding bird census for the Arizona Game and Fish Department and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service starting just a few miles SE of Tusayan in various years in the past. The Tusayan aircraft noise is deafening and degrades the quality of the census. Since much of bird censusing is done by ear as well as by sight, this leads to lesser quality science-- not to mention shattering our nerves with the deafening take-off and flight noise.

Sincerely,

Robert Witzeman, M.D., Conservation Chair.
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